

Short, Short Story

The Moment Monster

By PJ Crosby



Sitting in the first pew holding my mother's hand, staring straight ahead, I could see nothing in focus. My name spoken into the microphone brought me back from wherever I had traveled to. I rose from my seat as I felt my mother squeeze my hand. I looked at her swollen, tired eyes and tear stained face, squeezed her hand back, then began my journey up the three stairs that lead to the podium.

Once at the podium, I moved the microphone, adjusting it to my height. I cleared my throat and looked at the sea of different, emotional faces looking back at me. I wasn't shocked that so many had come to give my GanGan a proper send off; the pews were full and some people even stood in the back. All I could see even now, is GanGan resting in front of me, as if sleeping.

I battled for self-control. I refused to cry while honoring one of my favorite people on this planet, so I closed my eyes before speaking.

"My grandmother was a storyteller. She would take the fact that I'm on a winning relay team in my middle school, deduce therefore that I must be fast and then tell an elaborate story about how my speed or quick foot actions saved the world, a life, or a very important moment. Her stories made me laugh, cry, and sparked my inquisitive nature. She often told me to look things up and come back to her with the proper use of the word or phrase in a short story.

The last two years of her life were spent in a nursing home because mom said GanGan could no longer care for herself. At first I didn't understand; every weekend when we visited, she seemed fine. Then about six months in, I started to notice my GanGan changing. I would ask her to continue a story she had started from the previous week, but there was this lost look in her eyes and a cowering look to her shoulders, hunched in a way I had never seen her do before. She would speak, saying, "The monster is here, the monster is here." She looked terrified. It took me about two more visits before I realized which monster she spoke of.

It was Saturday. Mom and I walked into GanGan's room like we've been doing since she moved to the facility. She greeted my mom, looked at me and then asked my mother with a smile, "And who is this beautiful young lady?" I looked at my mom, then at my grandmother, gave a chuckle then said, "GanGan, it's your favorite granddaughter so stop playing!" She looked at mom, then at me, gave a nervous giggle and then said, "Gotcha!" That's when I saw it for the first time. That's when I realized what was going on.

The monster was stealing our moments together. It was stealing her moments by extinguishing her memories, like water to fire, with only remnants remaining. Over the next year and a half, I witnessed the Moment Monster chipping away at my grandmother's creativity, consuming her memories,... our precious memories. So much so that I became the storyteller and eventually that's all she knew me as.

I was 12 when my grandmother went into the care facility. I am 14 years old and a freshman in high school. I didn't mind repeating and embellishing upon the stories she had told me. Those stories gave me tremendous joy over the years and I wanted to give her back some of that same, child-like wonder joy.

Over the last year, my grandmother always smiled when she saw me, despite the fact that I knew she had no recall as to who I was to her. Jump ahead...Two months ago I asked my GanGan, "Do you know who I am?" She shook her head no. I continued with, "then why do you smile each time you see me?" Her reply made me cry because she allowed me to hug her after she answered. She hadn't allowed me close enough to touch her, much less hug her, in over seven months. She said softly, "you tell the best stories."

I opened my eyes and looked over the sea of tearful faces. "That was the last hug I received from my grandmother and I have since learned that the actual name of the thieving Moment Monster is Alzheimer's disease." I looked down on my grandmother sleeping peacefully and said, "I love you GanGan. Rest, I will see you again". I looked up once more, said thank you, and descended the three steps to once again join my mom on the front pew. She took my hand as she looked at me, smiled softly, wiped one of my tears away with the other hand as she said, "well done." The next tear dropped in my cupped hands as they rested on my lap.

HAPiko(live well)

The Lucky Dog
by Griff Marshall



The dog lifted its head and sniffed at the air. At this distance, Greg knew that it couldn't possibly smell the Marines in the OP. Still there was something about the way it turned its head and stared directly at Greg that made him briefly think otherwise.

There was wisdom in the mangy mutt's eyes. Greg had the impression that the animal was looking into Greg's soul. Greg wondered what the dog would see there.

"Stupid dog," Kolb grumbled to Heinrichs, the other Marine in the OP. Kolb raised his M4 and pointed it at the beast.

"Don't!" Greg hissed, cuffing Kolb, and glaring at Heinrichs. "If either of you so much as yell at that dog, I'll break your fucking necks."

"Relax," Heinrichs scoffed. "It's not worth having Sergeant Bean bitch us out for shooting the thing, anyway."

"It wouldn't be about the dog, but for giving away your position," Bean's voice announced from behind them. He slipped up next to Greg.

"The Sergeant-of-the-Guard is here. Everyone put your peckers away," Heinrichs said with mockery in his voice.

"If you give yourself a combat jerk in your OP, I'll feed your prick to that pup," Bean announced. Bean lifted his chin towards the stray. "Other than our four-legged friend out there, have you seen anything else?"

"Nope," Greg reported. "All quiet except the pooch out there."

"Hmm. It might be quiet, but our friend out there has got the scent of something," Bean observed. He sighted down his ACOG at the buildings in the distance. "What's that out there? Three hundred meters. One o'clock."

Greg looked through the scope of his own M4. He quickly found what Bean had indicated. It was a white pickup truck poking out from between two buildings.

"I don't remember it being there before." Greg admitted.

“Could be a technical, waiting until dark to attack.” Bean announced. He scribbled a note and handed it to Heinrichs. “Run back and tell the LT there’s machinegun-mounted technical out there. Give him these grid coordinates and ask to prep a fire mission.”

“You’re serious?” Heinrichs asked, his face noticeably pale, even in the dimming light.

“Yeah, I’m serious,” Bean growled. “Move it, Lance Corporal!”

Heinrichs needed no further encouragement. He sprinted from the OP, headed for the LT’s fighting position to their rear. Greg glanced at Bean and shook his head.

“It would have been easier if we had a radio out here,” Greg grumbled.

“Coulda, woulda, shoulda,” Bean mumbled. In the next moment, Bean’s eyes widened, and he was shouting over his shoulder loud enough for the rest of the Platoon to hear. “Contact front! Stand-to!”

In the distance, Greg spotted figures creeping out from between the buildings. Though it was too far to positively identify them, there was no doubt they were the enemy. They were all carrying AK-47s.

Greg put his eye to his ACOG and squeezed the trigger at the first man in his crosshairs. Greg’s M4 kicking into his shoulder, making him lose sight of his target. He quickly looked for another.

All along the line, the rest of the Platoon had joined the fight. Greg spotted puffs of smoke kicked up around the approaching enemy. Some of them were falling, but still others came.

Greg’s ears were ringing with adrenaline. And from the rapid report of Kolb’s M4 beside him. Greg ignored him as he tried to match Bean’s coolness.

The Platoon kept a steady rate of fire on their attackers, and Gregg was sure they were on the verge of pushing the enemy back. Just when it looked like the enemy was about to retreat, everything changed. A mounted machinegun opened fire, spraying the platoon with heavy fire.

“Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!” Kolb wailed as he dropped to the bottom of the OP.

Supported by the rapid-fire from the technical, the enemy pressed their attack again. Closer they came, running headlong towards the platoon. Greg suddenly feared that the Marines would be overrun.

Greg wouldn’t let himself retreat. Instead, he aimed at the running figures, squeezing the trigger over and over. He wasn’t sure he was hitting anything, but he kept at it.

The M4 kicked in Greg’s hand, empty. Ducking down to reload, Greg’s heart felt like it was beating out of his chest. He’d never been so scared in his life. It didn’t help that Kolb was in the fetal position at that bottom of the OP, screaming in fear.

Greg willed himself back to his feet. Before he got there, Bean was pulling him back below the sandbags. Greg collapsed on top of Kolb and Bean's heavy body covered them both.

"STAY DOWN!" Bean shouted as Greg struggled under Bean's weight. "DANGER CLOSE!"

It took Greg a moment to figure out what Bean meant. That's when he heard it. The distinct whistling sound of mortars falling from the sky.

A massive concussion vibrated through the ground. Another followed. Several more landed in succession.

Gasping for air, Greg sucked in a mouthful of dust. Coughing, he struggled out from under Bean. The Sergeant had a big grin on his face.

The two Marines peeked above the lip of the OP. The gunfire had ceased, an eerily calm replacing the noise. Ahead of the OP, the open area was pockmarked with fresh craters.

"Did they get 'em all?" Greg asked, unsure how anything could possibly have survived the mortar's onslaught.

"Not all," Bean laughed. He pointed into the wasteland ahead of them. "It looks like we have a survivor."

Greg searched for what Bean was indicating. Nothing was moving, certainly none of the attackers. It took a moment for Greg to realize what Bean had really meant.

Only feet away from where it had been earlier, Greg spotted the mangy mutt. Once again, the animal was looking directly at Greg. The dog took one last sniff of the air before trotting away. Greg waived, sorry to see it go.

"Lucky dog," Greg chuckled.

BACK IN THE WORLD

By Steve Banko



The transition wasn't made any easier by the speed at which it happened. Friday night I was in the jungle being eaten alive by any number of flying insects. The following Thursday, I was standing in line with my punch cards in hand registering for college.

I was a mess of contradictions as I stood in those lines with hundreds of fresh scrubbed faces of kids eager to register. I supposed I had one of those faces a few years ago when I started my first foray into higher education but that "me" was a fading memory. Sixteen months in combat has a way of changing you.

On one hand, I was happy to be removed from the ordeal of Vietnam combat. My body had been battered and shot and healed and battered again. I'd taken four bullets while fighting leading my father to tell me I was lucky. I knew, though, that lucky was when the bullet missed. I still wasn't fully healed but still relieved to be out of that chamber of hell.

But when you have shared the worse the world has to offer with a bunch of guys on whom you trusted with your life, you don't just walk away without regret. All the way across the ocean I wondered what my squad was doing, whether they were in danger, if any of them were getting hurt. Now, half a world away from the dread of Vietnam, I still wondered about them and their safety.

Once the drudgery of registration was over, I tried to settle into my new life as a student. I was majoring in English and I was pretty lucky to get most of the courses I needed. It hadn't been two weeks since I was in jungle fatigues and then I was in classrooms delving into the works of John Milton and Alexander Pope. But the one class I looked forward to was creative writing. I had always liked to write and had enjoyed some minor success with it. I was anxious to learn more to perfect the art of written expression.

My first assignment was easy enough: write 500 words on any subject just to let the professor gauge the abilities in the class. I wrote about what I knew; I wrote about a semi-humorous episode from my early days in Vietnam. We were in class to get our papers back and hear about our efforts. Names were being called, papers returned and comments made but not to me. The professor had but one paper in his hand when he called my name.

"This is your paper?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"Might I assume from the subject matter that you are a veteran of the Vietnam conflict?"

I thought a little humor would lighten the mood.

"Yes sir. I thought my short haircut and the tan might have given me away."

All I got in return was a blank stare.

"You may find some humor in what you did in that immoral endeavor but I do not," he said. "There is nothing funny about the horror being inflicted on Vietnam."

"Well ..."

"Allow me to finish without your interruption," he said.

I was starting to get a little pissed off.

"I have a recommendation for you," he said. "I recommend that you take the necessary steps to drop this class while you can get a refund of tuition. You may be assured that I will never give a passing grade to anyone who prosecuted our criminal war against the peace-loving peoples of Vietnam."

My impulse was to slap this perfidious twit in the face but I was working on my anger issues at the VA so I ruled that out. I snatched my paper from his hand and knew I needed to get away from this guy. I started for the door but needed to get a shot into the fray.

"For the record, teach, those peace-loving Vietnamese you mention shot me four times," I said.

"You probably deserved it," he answered.

As I left the building I thought about all the people who had fallen at my hand: strangers against whom I'd been pitted by the call of my country, people with whom I had no quarrel. Now I encountered someone I who I would have gladly wasted but the rules of civilization were back in force.

This world I'd been so anxious to get back to was going to require some adjustment.

Short Script

“Art Therapy”

By Jenn Whittaker

FADE IN:

EXT. LOFT - DUSK

Late 90s punk music BLARES from inside a garage loft tucked behind an exclusive downtown home.

Furniture from the loft lies haphazardly piled outside.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

AJ SINDER, 19, thin, long hair, PARKS her car behind a small pick-up truck adorned with bumper stickers of all kinds.

She turns her head in the direction of the loft as the music ECHOES.

She rolls her eyes and SLAMS the car door shut as she gets out.

EXT. LOFT - CONTINUOUS

AJ takes slow STEPS on the cobblestone walkway toward the loft as the music grows LOUDER.

She pauses and gazes at the pile of furniture, SIGHS, and rubs her temples.

LOUD BANGS, CRASHES, and THUDS come from inside the loft even over the music.

She waits as she holds the doorknob. She EXHALES and OPENS the door.

INT. LOFT - CONTINUOUS

WILL BRADLEY, 25, 6'0, full build but not overly muscular, JUMPS through the air naked covered from head to toe in a variety of colored paints.

He SLAMS into a wall with full force, FALLS to the floor, which has industrial plastic laid down over it, and LAUGHS HYSTERICALLY.

AJ SHUTS the door behind her and calmly turns off the stereo.

2021 Bay Pines Creative Arts Festival



Will STANDS, SQUEEZES bright red acrylic paint from a tube, and SMEARS it onto his hairless chest.

AJ
(soothingly)
Will.

Will
(grins, sarcastically)
So, AJ...how do you like it?

AJ looks at the walls. Each possesses a body-sized, multi-colored human ink blot.

AJ
(quizzical)
Is this some twisted Jackson Pollock phase you're going through?

WILL
Cute...you get it though, right?

He DARTS toward her and she RUNS in circles in the little loft.

He CATCHES her.

He KISSES her passionately and RUBS his body all over hers, which covers her clothes in paint.

They continue to embrace.

AJ
You've certainly left your mark. That's enough, don't you think?

WILL
(sarcastically)
Oppressor.

AJ
(sternly)
I am not cleaning this up.

WILL
Lazy oppressor.

They KISS deeply.

AJ STEPS out of Will's arms.

AJ
I'm gonna go to a meeting. I wanna talk to my sponsor. That should give you
enough time to get our stuff off the lawn.

Will wraps his arms around her from behind.

WILL
(seductively)
AJ, stay.

AJ STEPS away covered in more paint.

AJ
Oh, no, Mister. Don't even think about it. I'm not rolling around
naked in all this paint.
(puts finger to lips)
Actually...that sounds kinda fun.
(looks down and GRABS tube of paint)
Wait. These're the acrylics your mother sent you.

Will SNATCHES the tube of paint back from AJ.

WILL
(flatly)
Forget that.
(seductively)
Stay. Play with me.

Will runs his wet paint-covered hands down the sides of her face, which leaves streaks.

He KISSES her neck.

She STEPS away.

AJ

Maybe you need a meeting, too.

Will gestures all around the room.

WILL

(raises voice)

What do you think this is all about?

AJ

(shakes head)

Don't you say it. Just don't –

WILL

(loudly)

Art therapy! You should try it.

Will holds out the tube of paint to AJ.

AJ

(impatiently)

Will...you're manic.

WILL

Manic? This is inspiration.

(adamantly)

I can tell the difference.

AJ

Can you? At least call your doctor...for me.

Will begins to PACE around the room and flails his arms.

WILL

Medication isn't the answer. They've tried everything! It can't suppress inspiration. Nothing can. It's too powerful.

AJ tries to STEP into his field of vision repeatedly.

AJ

I don't want you to hurt yourself, again. For God's sake, you're slamming yourself into walls. You're destroying our home. You're destroying us.

WILL

(points to door)

Then get out! If you can't understand I have no use for you.

AJ

(tearful)

How can you say that? I've stood by you through everything. But this –

WILL

So, what are you waiting for?

AJ

It's about your mother, Will. She locked you in closets your entire childhood.

WILL

She was hiding me! She protected me!

AJ

You gotta deal with it...somehow. But this kind of

(makes air quotes)

“art therapy”...it's not the answer.

WILL

(angry rant)

So, you don't get it! You never will! I'm destined to traverse this universe alone.

It's my penance.

AJ gazes around the room.

AJ

I can't help you, can I? I never could.

WILL

I don't need help. I need you to see my vision.

AJ

This isn't vision. This is...it's something else.

WILL

(points to AJ)

You're bound by the social norms of

(makes air quotes)

"proper society" and just as blind as the rest of those sheep!

AJ STOMPS through paint and the plastic CRUNCHES beneath her feet as she heads for the door.

She turns before she EXITS.

AJ

(aggressive)

Blind? I'd pluck out my eyeballs if it would erase the sight of you...this self-destruction, this downward spiral into madness!

(begins to cry)

I gotta go.

Will THROWS the tube of paint at AJ who ducks to dodge it.

WILL

Then go! And never come back!

FADE TO BLACK:

THE END.

The Park Bench for Men Only

By Harry Moses



My name is Joe Beamer, I am 73 years old and have been retired from The Ford Motor Company for 8 years. Almost every morning I come down to this park and sit on this bench. I bring some stale bread and feed it to the pigeons. On or about 9:30 my friend Jack Wasnicki shows up and we play checkers for a while and we chat back and forth until about 11:30 and then I go home for lunch. I often take a nap after lunch or watch the news, mow the lawn or wash my car. By then its dinner time. After dinner I have a beer or two while watching a baseball or a basketball game and by 9:30 I go to bed. Tomorrow I'll get up and do the same damn thing as I did today and every day of the week. That's my retirement. My wife Constance of 46 years, spends most of her time on the phone, making quilts or going to church to pray for me. That's her retirement. Oh yeah, she spends a lot of time eating sweets; Her girlish figure left about the same time that our cat died and went to heaven, about 40 years ago. Oh, I think she also still prays for the cat. When Jack shows up, we start every conversation with our respective medical updates. Jack has a prostate problem and he will tell me how many times he got up last night to pee and how the new medication isn't working and I'll tell him about my nightly leg cramps and my back problems. Here comes Jack now with that worn out checker set. "Hey Jack what's the number from last night?"

Jack "4 times again. That damn medicine hasn't worked since Doc gave it to me 3 months ago. I've got to go see him again." Also I think my hair is falling out; do you think it could be that medicine?" Go head it's your move

Joe..... " Maybe, but you are 76 so your hair is bound to fall out. What's that thing on your arm? You better have that looked after. Skin cancer can be serious.

Jack.... "This? It's a tattoo of my mother that I got it when I was in the Navy. You know Jack, you're not a very good checker player . King me.

Joe:.... OK, OK there. You know I never noticed it before. And a fine looking woman she is or was before your arm got so flabby. Anyhow anything new with your wife Emma?

Jack.....Talk about flabby. Emma came to me this morning and asked me to look at what she thought was a hole between her breasts. I had to tell her it was her belly button. Then she screamed at me and walked out of the room and I had to get my own lunch. Why is she so sensitive? Your move and you know you're about to lose again. I love this game.

Joe....Jack you should know by now that all women are sensitive. Just the

other night I was over at The Barn Door Pub and there's this guy sitting at the bar working on his 4th boiler maker. I figured he wanted to talk so I asked him what was eating at him. He said he and his wife had a blowup. It all started when he told his wife that he thought she had put on a little weight lately, you know just trying to help. With that she yells an obscenity and says she not speaking to him for a month and runs into the bed room and slams the door. So I says what's wrong with that, a little peace and quiet I would think it would be great. You should be happy not sad. He says I'm sad and drinking because this is day 30 already. By the way Jack, you don't look so good, do you feel all right?

Jack ...".That's a another thing . By the time I got home last night, I was soaked, had torn my pants, had sand in my shoes, burdocks in my hair and had been bitten by a snake".

Joe..." I told you not to hike up Homer's bluff, you're too old."

Jack... "I didn't hike the bluff, I was playing golf and you know I'm not very good. I'd quit that damn game if I weren't married"

Joe"I know, its 6 hours of diversion from having to say "yes dear."

Jack...."How about we both chip in for a new checker board? This one is about had it."

Joe..."You know Jack our lives are truly meaningless. Every day we sit here, talk to each other and play checkers which is a game I've grown to hate and then go home.. Even at our age there has to be something we can do, that we could really have fun with and enjoy."

Jack.... "Well I always wanted to sky dive. And how about stock car racing at the Oval or I always wanted to.....

Joe.... "Bye Jack, see you tomorrow. Buy us a new board".